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ABSTRACT

This review of the status of English language instruction in Sarawak, Malaysia, provides an overview of the role of English in the society in general and outlines the status of English use and instruction in the educational system at all levels (preprimary, elementary, secondary, higher, vocational, adult, and teacher education). Topics covered include: the characteristics and training of English language instructors, the type and availability of instructional materials, educational administration and planning in relation to English teaching, English instruction outside the educational system, British and other international support, commercial opportunities related to English instruction, and other sources of information. The principal strengths of the English instruction in Malaysia are the wide use of English and government concern for continued high standards. The main weaknesses are the abandonment of a passing grade in English as a requirement for promotion in schools, lack of trained teachers, and a current austerity drive making preventive and remedial action difficult. (MSE)

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ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

Country: Sarawak - Malaysia

Date: April 1986

1. ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

The role of English within the education system is declining year by year. Before 1976 English was the main medium of instruction. In 1976, however, the National Education Policy was extended to Sarawak and the conversion to Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction began. The change-over is proceeding at the rate of one form a year. All education below secondary Form 5 is currently in Bahasa Malaysia. English will have been completely replaced as the medium of instruction by the end of 1988.

Although English is no longer an offical language in Sarawak it continues to be widely used as a medium of communication in commercial circles and government departments. It is also widely used by educated people as a means of communication, particularly between the various communities. English books and English language local newspapers are widely read and some radio broadcasts are in English.

2. ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

English is taught from primary one upwards. The time allotted for English language teaching is 300 minutes a week in Bahasa Malaysia-medium primary schools and 180 minutes a week in Chinese-medium schools. In secondary schools, 240 minutes a week is allocated for English language teaching. English is examined by the same public examinations as in the rest of Malaysia.

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Success in English is no longer a formal requirement for advancement within the school system. Universities in Malaysia do, however, require Malaysia-medium students to pass an English special paper in their first year.

The average school-leaver from an English-medium school has a very good command of English. His counterpart from a Bahasa Malaysia-medium school has a very much poorer command of the language.

Curricula and syllabuses are formulated centrally by the Curriculum Development Centre in Kuala Lumpur. The selection of textbooks is also controlled centrally.

The Inspectorate is federally controlled; its powers are only advisory now. The secondary school inspectors are all based in Kuching and report to the Director of Education. There are posts for two English inspectors both of which are vacant at present. They are likely to remain so for some time.

The primary inspectors are based in three zones and report to the Divisional Education Officers. Zone 1 inspectors are based in Kuching and cover Divisions 1 and 2. Zones 2 inspectors are based in Sibu and cover Divisions 3, 6 and 7. Zone 3 inspectors are based in Miri and cover Divisions 4 and 5.

There are five vocational schools, in Kuching, Sibu and Miri. English is a compulsory subject.

There is no university in Sarawak. However, there are local branches of the MARA Institute of Technology and of the Universiti Pertanian. English is no longer the main medium of instruction, but much effort is devoted to improving students' English.

Adult education classes are organized by the Council for Further Education; they offer classes in academic subjects, languages and commercial subjects and some English is taught. Students are also prepared for London Chamber of Commerce and Industry examinations.

There is no teaching of English for Special Purposes in Sarawak.

The Educational Broadcasting Service broadcasts radio and television programmes for primary and secondary schools. English language radio programmes are broadcast for primary classes. These include programmes made locally. Use of the programmes varies.

No English language programmes are broadcast for secondary school students.

3. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

Almost all teachers are local citizens.

Twenty four percent of primary school teachers are untrained. The initial training of primary school teachers is carried out at Batu Lintang Teachers College (Kuching), Rajang TTC (Bintangor) and Sarawak TTC (Miri). They all receive some basic training in the methodology of English language teaching (ELT) during the three-year course. There are very few specialist teachers of English in the primary schools.

3

Twelve percent of secondary school teachers are untrained. Most of these are untrained graduates working in the upper secondary schools (Forms 4 and 5) but there are also a large number of 'temporary' teachers. Thirty-two percent of English teachers are not trained to teach English. Secondary school teachers generally receive their basic training at universities and colleges in Peninsular Malaysia or at Batu Lintang Training College in Kuching. About thirty trainees usually specialize in English each year.

Two or three in-service courses are generally held each year for English teachers. This is sufficient to meet the need if not the demand.

There is a local English Language Teacher's Association.

4. MATERIALS SUPPORT

Schools are adequately supplied with textbooks. All primary schools use New Primary English, published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. In theory a secondary school can select a textbook from the eight prescribed by the Federal Textbooks Bureau. In practice, however, most schools use the textbook provided by the Textbooks on Loan scheme. About 80% of secondary classes therefore use New Guided English by D.H. Howe (Oxford University Press).

Schools are reasonably well provided with supplementary reading material. The Education Department has given all secondary schools about one book for every two pupils. Bookshops are not usually well provided with simplified readers.

The forty-two libraries around the State all have some English books.

5. EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO ENGLISH TEACHING

The Malaysia English Teaching Profile gives an outline of the administrative structure of the Ministry of Education.

Within the Department of Education, ELT matters are currently handled by the English Language Unit, a sub-section of the Curriculum Section.

6. DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

The information in the Malaysia English Teaching Profile applies here.

7. ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Several private tuition schools provide extra English classes for primary and secondary school pupils. Their enrolments are expanding.

8. BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

There is one Key English Language Teaching Scheme (KELT) post in Sarawak: English Language Adviser to the Department of Education. The Adviser is assisted by two Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) volunteers.

No direct teaching of English is undertaken by the British Council but the readers and cassettes in the British Council library are very widely used.

9. AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

There is no American-funded ELT activity in Sarawak.

10. OTHER AGENCY SUPPORT

The only agencies involved in ELT are volunteer organizations.

11. COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

There are currently minimal prospects for the sale of ELT materials and paid services from the UK. Software needs are met by local companies or local subsidiaries of international companies. The demand for services may increase when standards decline as a result of the change of medium of instruction. The information in the English Teaching Profile for Malaysia should apply here.

12. CREATIVE WRITING

None.

13. CURRENT RESEARCH

None.

14. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

Annual statistical report produced by the Department of Education.

15. **GENERAL STATEMENT**

The main strengths of English in Sarawak:

It is very widely used as a means of communication.

It will continue to be widely used despite current efforts to promote the use of Bahasa Malaysia.

The Department of Education seems genuinely concerned that the standard of English should be maintained as far as possible.

The weakness of the current position:

A pass in English is no longer required for promotion in schools. The subject is therefore increasingly treated as irrelevant by Bahasa Malaysia-medium students.

There are not enough trained teachers of English.

The current austerity drive makes it difficult to take preventive or remedial action.